**Using Signs at Kimi Ora**

Empowering students to communicate increases their access to the curriculum, self-esteem, competence, confidence, ability to make relationships, participate in decision making and gives them more control over their lives. Effective communicators use a variety of tools: gesture, body language, facial expression, objects, photographs, drawings, symbols, written words, vocalisation, intonation and access to technology, in order to understand the world and express themselves. Signs and symbols, in particular are widely acknowledged to be extremely effective tools, especially when they are used systematically.

Makaton is the primary form of sign language that we use at Kimi Ora. If we cannot find the sign in the New Zealand Makaton book, we look up the Children’s Visual Communication Dictionary (Voice Thru Your Hands). We use the NZSL book as the last resort, as the signs are more complex and there are sometimes two signs for the same word or idea.

Follow the chart below when finding signs.

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1. When using sign, only sign the key words. For example if the message is "do you want to paint or play" the key words would be 'you', 'paint' and 'play.'

2. Always speak and sign together.

3. Make sure your signing can be seen.

4. Remember facial expression and tone of voice are important too.

5. Try to speak and sign in short phrases to make it easier to support your message with the key signs.

6. Think about choosing the appropriate signs for the context e.g. Different 'wash' signs: for washing hands and washing the car.

7. Demonstrate good practice by signing yourself.

8. Try to be as accurate as you can but don't worry if the student's signs are unclear.

9. Praise students for using signs.

10. Don't worry if you forget a sign, and use natural gesture as much as possible.

Remember to have fun; students enjoy signing.